



St Vincent de Paul Society
NSW
good works

SUMMER 2025
ISSUE NO. 96

NEWS



**MEASURING THE
IMPACT OF MEMBERS**
OUR SOCIAL JUSTICE PRIORITIES
CELEBRATING FIRST NATIONS CULTURE
MEET OUR NEW PRESIDENT

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Supervising Editor: Thomas Morgan

Contributors: Kate Pascoe, Robert Crosby, Ashlea Wheeler, Lina Preciado, Leo Tucker

Designed by: Megan Pope, Claire Hutchinson

All correspondence can be sent to:
Director, Communications & Marketing
St Vincent de Paul Society
PO Box 5, Petersham NSW 2049
Email: media.nsw@vinnies.org.au

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President's Message



As we enter the joyful Christmas season, it is a time to reflect on all we have achieved in the past year and look ahead to the impact we can make in the year to come.

Over the past 12 months, numerous lives have been changed for the better through your compassion, generosity, and belief in the Society's ability to make a difference.

Your dedication ensures that the light of hope and the spirit of Christmas touch every corner of our community every day. The support you offer extends far beyond material assistance. It represents the Vincentian commitment to serving in hope, bringing joy and dignity to those who may feel forgotten, excluded, or facing adversity.

As we carry this spirit into the coming year, let us continue to serve with love, kindness, and a shared commitment to our mission. The hardship faced by many can at times seem overwhelming, but your efforts shine through, ensuring that hope endures in the hearts of those we serve.

On behalf of the State Council, thank you for your tireless dedication. May you and your families enjoy a Christmas filled with warmth, joy, and the fulfillment that comes from knowing you have made a meaningful difference in the lives of others.

Warm regards,
Peter Houweling,
State President,
St Vincent de Paul Society NSW

CEO's Message



It is heartening to see the work of our members, volunteers and employees striving to alleviate the hardship people face in both the short and long-term.

The findings of The McKell Institute report into the effectiveness of our member assistance programs, detailed on page 7, affirm the impact the Society is able to make through the provision of material support, but, more importantly, the comfort we are able to offer to people in their times of need. This aspect of our support is what defines the assistance we provide – being present with people, listening without judgement and allowing those who feel voiceless to be heard.

As important as this support is in meeting the immediate needs of the people we assist, our work in advocating to address the systemic causes of hardship is also significant. Through the relationships we have with

community and government, we are able to deliver results, such as securing a new Vinnies Van, funded by the NSW Government, to expand our services; collaborating with the Tenants Union and NSW Rental Commissioner to achieve fairer legislation for renters; and working with peak housing bodies to secure an historic investment in social housing. These relationships play an important role in ensuring we can make a difference wherever there is need.

Thank you all for your efforts over the past year and may the Christmas season be blessed for you and your loved ones. The values you live by each day transforms lives and helps to shape a more just and compassionate society.

Yolanda Saiz
Chief Executive Officer,
St Vincent de Paul Society NSW

A year of impact across the Society

Close to 100,000 people were supported by St Vincent de Paul Society NSW members in the last financial year.

This powerful figure speaks to the growing demand for assistance throughout communities, along with the extraordinary response of our people to change lives for the better.

This impact and much more is featured in our latest Annual Report, detailing the work we have been able to achieve as a united Society working to shape a more just and compassionate community.

This year has also seen progress made towards our Strategic Plan, “Strengthening Communities, Transforming Lives”, with our Enabling Services delivering fantastic results to enhance the impact we make for the people we assist.

Our Commercial Enterprise, Retail and Fundraising operations have generated \$125 million in funds that will enable our programs and services, while also making a positive environmental impact promoting sustainability and reducing waste ending up in landfill.

The campaigning and advocacy of our Social Justice Team over many years helped to secure a record \$6.1 billion investment in social housing at the state budget, ensuring thousands of people in need will have a safe

place to call home.

We’ve been able to increase our membership base by 12% with 4,400 members living out our mission and vision in communities throughout the state. As part of this growing cohort of members, 900 young people are engaged with the Society through Youth Conferences and programs.

We are so thankful to the nearly 7,900 volunteers who support our good works – 80% of volunteers generously give their time volunteering at our Vinnies Shops.

“Thank you for your dedication and for the warmth and compassion you continuously extend to those who need it most.”

“Your efforts ensure that the light of hope and the Vincentian spirit touches every corner of our community every day,” said Peter Houweling, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW State President.

Printed copies of the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW 2023/24 Year in Review will be mailed out to Conferences throughout summer.



View the full version of the Annual Report by scanning the QR code.

Some of our key achievements over the past 12 months include:



\$13.7 million

in financial and material aid provided to people in need through our members



11,800 people

supported by our Vinnies Services across Homelessness and Housing, Health, and Disability and Inclusion



102,000 people

across the state assisted by our Vinnies Vans

Following in Vincentian footsteps

Peter Houweling has spent decades putting his Catholic social justice upbringing into practice as a member of the St Vincent de Paul Society.

Elected to the role of NSW State Council President in August 2024, following the passing of his predecessor Paul Burton, Peter sees his role as a steward of every Vincentian who has come before him, ensuring that members can have the most authentic experience of the Society.

Born to a migrant family, who emigrated in the 1950's and worked in Bonegilla migrant camp before moving to the Western Suburbs, Peter was educated by the Patrician Brothers in Fairfield and Liverpool. Training professionally as a teacher, he came to the Illawarra in the early 1970s. He and his young family attended St John the Evangelist Parish in Dapto, where, encouraged by parish priest Father John Ward, Peter first became involved with the Society.

At that time, Conference meetings took place in the evenings, with new members being paired with seasoned Vincentians for visitations and mentoring. Peter fondly remembers the lasting influence of fellow members, whose passion for serving others made a deep impression.

“Through them, I learned the significance of the Conference in developing friendship, service, prayer and developing an understanding of the Rule,” Peter explains.

“As a steward, you're obligated to uphold the values and ethos that those past members cherished – it's our responsibility.”

As his family grew and career advanced, Peter stepped back into an auxiliary role, but his retirement in the early 2010s marked a second chapter of involvement with the Society.

Leadership roles soon followed, with his background as a teacher and principal positioning him to serve as a Conference, Regional, and Central Council President in the Wollongong Central Council. In 2022, Peter was appointed as Deputy President and Vice President of Membership for the State Council, where he focused on setting up new conferences and addressing governance



issues, creating pathways for younger members to assume leadership positions.

As State President, Peter is dedicated to keeping advocacy and social justice central to the Society's mission. Inspired by Blessed Frederic Ozanam, he believes that the Society's role is not only to alleviate poverty but also to confront the systemic injustices that sustain it through an unwavering commitment to social justice and reform.

The principle of subsidiarity, central to the Society's work, is another priority for Peter.

“Each Conference – whether at the parish, regional, or state level – is a critical building block of our work. If Conferences fail, the Society falters. Together, we are the Society, and we must never underestimate the power and responsibility that lie within our local communities.”

Peter feels honoured to follow in the footsteps of Vincentians before him, serving as State Council President and contributing to the transformative work of an international organisation dedicated to the welfare of all people.

“Even now, after all this time with the Society, I continue to learn more about the depth and breadth of the work we do and the societal impact we have.”

NSW Premier launches new Vinnies Van

The Society unveiled a new Vinnies Van, proudly funded by the NSW Government, at a barbeque lunch hosted by State Premier Chris Minns and the Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs NRL club.

The Premier joined NRL Bulldogs legends Terry Lamb and Josh Reynolds in manning the barbeque alongside representatives from the St George Dragons junior rugby league football club to ensure no one went hungry at a lunchtime service in Waterloo.

“The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW has a well-established presence in communities all across the state and provides important relief to people through its members and services every day,” said Chris Minns.

“Vinnies Vans provide people with more than just a meal by acting as a space for social connection and referrals to other support services,” said Mr Minns.

The new Vinnies Van, a purpose-built Isuzu Tradepack truck, is the latest in our fleet of 13 vans providing meals and support each night across the state.

More than 102,000 people have been supported by our Vinnies Vans in the last year with over 95,000 meals served and 85,000 snack and toiletries packs distributed.

In Central Sydney alone, our Vinnies Vans operate seven nights a week – along with two day-time shifts – supporting more than 3,000 people on average each month.

“What we’re seeing at the Society is an increase in demand in regards to cost of living and housing costs,” said Yolanda Saiz, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW CEO.

“For many people that we see on these vans, when we come across them it’s the first time that day they’ve spoken to someone. It also addresses that loneliness and gives them a sense of community,” said Ms Saiz.

The increased demand for services has seen the Society expand our Vinnies Vans into new areas across the state, along with providing additional resources including a dedicated outreach case worker.

This role aims to connect people seeking assistance from our Vinnies Vans with additional support offered by the Society and other services to address compounding hardships.

“We’re grateful for the support of the NSW Government in funding a new Vinnies Van which will allow us to reach more people and provide much-needed certainty in their time of hardship,” said Peter Houweling, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW State President.



Learn more about our Vinnies Vans by scanning the QR code.



Immediate aid makes a measurable impact

We know that our members make a difference in the lives of thousands of people facing hardship each year.

Now we have the data to confirm that impact, thanks to a landmark report produced by The McKell Institute examining the effectiveness of our emergency relief programs.

The 'Immediate Aid, Measurable Impact' report surveyed 900 people supported by the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW during a 12-month period with respondents expressing strong satisfaction at the compassionate support provided by our members.

"When I was sick and couldn't walk after surgery, Vinnies helped with meals. They can't be your hands and feet, but having their support makes a difference," said a woman surveyed as part of the research.

The Executive Summary of the report found that, "Emergency relief services, such as those provided by various charities and community organisations like [St Vincent de Paul] Society NSW, play an essential role in the early intervention space and alleviating poverty, especially during cost of living crises such as that being felt by millions of Australians today."

Some of the key findings to come out of the report include:

- More than 80% of people surveyed felt positively about the emergency relief program delivered by the Society
- Close to four in five people felt that the support provided had been instrumental in helping them progress towards stability and self-sufficiency
- 82% identified the support provided by the Society as playing a key role in averting severe issues such as eviction or severe hunger
- 89% reported that receiving support from the Society had a positive impact on their stress levels and overall well-being

The report also analysed data recorded by our members between January to December 2023, revealing that over 95,000 people had been supported during that calendar year. Demand from primary people seeking assistance increased by 18% from the previous 12 months, while close to a third of people requested support for the first time.



In addition to addressing people's immediate needs, the wrap-around support provided by our members was praised for connecting people with additional services offered by the Society and externally. By connecting people with comprehensive and continuous support, our members can offer a crucial 'hand up', reaching people at their most vulnerable points and assisting to prevent deeper crises.

Amanda Rishworth, Minister for Social Services, launched the report at our Vinnies Support Centre in Hurstville alongside local Member for Barton, Linda Burney.

The Federal MPs heard from people directly assisted by our members, who expressed their gratitude for knowing that the Society is there in times of need.

Thank you to all our members who are the heroes behind this research. Your belief in a more just and compassionate society makes a difference to people in need every day.

See the full 'Immediate Aid, Measurable Impact' report at: vinnies.org.au/reports



A celebration of culture

Gumbaynggirr country set the scene for a celebration of our third Reconciliation Action Plan and the annual First Nations Staff Conference held in September.

The Society's latest Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), endorsed by Reconciliation Australia at the Innovate level, affirms our commitment to First Nations justice, strengthening ties to communities and creating opportunities for economic participation.

Pete's Place in Coffs Harbour was selected to showcase our RAP by recognising the connection many of the people we assist have to Gumbaynggirr country. More than half of the people supported by Pete's Place identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander; the service has worked hard to develop local connections in consultation and alongside the people we assist to cultivate a welcoming and culturally-safe environment.

Local Elder Aunty Jenny gave a Welcome to Country followed by a smoking ceremony from traditional owner Matt Flanders, which allowed attendees to cleanse themselves with the smoke.

The celebration brought together people from across the Society, local Aboriginal organisations and the people we assist in the name of advancing reconciliation.

Leading into the RAP celebration First Nations staff from all parts of the Society took part in the second annual First Nations Staff Conference to connect, build foundations, and support the development and progression of the Society's inclusion, diversity, and First Nations priorities.

The Society has committed to hosting a First Nations conference annually, allowing employees to travel to

different traditional lands to experience culture and connection to country.

Staff connected and yarned on the first day about 'walking in two worlds' as First Nations people who belong as part of the Society. The Executive Leadership Team joined the conference on the second day for a discussion on how to improve cultural safety across the organisation.

The second day also saw the Policy and Advocacy team present on our social justice engagement and sought input from the network to inform our upcoming Social Justice Statement on First Nations justice.

The conference ended with a cultural immersion activity by Matt Flanders, who showcased handmade artefacts used by the traditional owners to connect and care for country.

"He showed us how his respect and care for country can also then utilise country through cultural protocol and following lore," said Samantha McGuire, Vinnies First Nations Engagement Manager.

"Each mob has different tools that are specific to the way in which they operate and live."

"It was great to share culture, community and connection."



Learn more about the Society's commitment to reconciliation by scanning the QR code.

Activate Youth Pilgrimage

Youth members took a trip through the history of the Society in NSW as part of the Activate Youth Pilgrimage.

St Patrick's Catholic Church – the Society was born in NSW with the formation of a Conference in The Rocks district of Sydney in 1881.

Charles O'Neill's former home – Charles Gordon O'Neill was born in Scotland and came to Sydney to re-establish the Society in Australia after earlier efforts in Melbourne dissipated. He called 200 Cumberland Street his home and paved the way for more than 140 years of Vincentian good works in NSW.

Matthew Talbot Hostel – the Matthew Talbot Hostel was first opened by Bishop Norman Gilroy in Kent Street in 1938 to support men experiencing homelessness on the streets of Sydney. The Talbot has since relocated to Woolloomooloo in 1965 and stands as one of the Society's most well-known services.

St Francis' Church – the former St Francis' Church in Haymarket formed one of the first Conferences in NSW. Conferences have grown across the state with members providing crucial assistance to people in need.

Vinnies Crown Street – our Vinnies Shops play a vital role in enabling the good works of the Society by raising funds and contributing to a sustainable future.



Members united by shared principles

Our annual Member Leaders + Youth Activate Forums brought together members for a weekend of connection and inspiration to continue making a difference across the state.

The theme of the weekend was centered on a principle central to the work of the Society: 'The Dignity of the Human Person'. Members of the Society live out the principle of human dignity – recognising the sacredness of life and that every person has inherent dignity and worth – by serving local communities every day and putting the people we assist first in all of our good works.

Taking place at Mary MacKillop Place in North Sydney, members enjoyed separate programming on the first day before coming together on day two to put the principles of human dignity into action through a series of workshops.

Member leaders were privileged to hear from Robert Fitzgerald AM, Australian Human Rights Commission – Age Discrimination Commissioner, along with discussions on ensuring the dignity of the people we assist led by presidents and the membership team.

Youth members were immersed in the legacy of the Society as part of a pilgrimage visiting historic sites around Sydney. At the conclusion of the pilgrimage, youth members assembled care packages at the Vinnies Support Centre in Redfern to be distributed to people in need.

The weekend was also an opportunity for prospective members to come along and be part of the Vincentian community.

A great time was had by members of all ages, united by a shared understanding of human dignity and Vincentian spirit.

"To all the members, including those who travelled from interstate, I appreciate your time, energy, and enthusiasm. Thank you for making the event a success," said Peter Houweling, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW State President.



Members head west in time of need

Communities in Far West NSW were met with a hand up from our members following major power outages in October.

A significant storm damaged local transmission towers and the network supplying power to the region, leaving homes and businesses without power and reliant upon backup generators.

In response, the Society partnered with the NSW Reconstruction Authority to provide assistance to residents in Broken Hill and surrounding communities. Our membership team travelled from Sydney to support local Conference members at the Recovery Access Point, who drew on connections within the community

to assist affected households with supermarket vouchers, generator fuel and support for replenishing perishable pharmaceutical items.

The impact caused by the power outages allowed the Society to implement our disaster response framework in a real-life scenario. The framework was developed in consultation with the Humanitarian Action Group (HAG) following the floods that devastated the state throughout 2022.

Our members responded to over 850 households within the first three days of providing assistance at the Recovery Access Point and continued to offer support throughout November.

Vision reader survey

We love sharing the good works of the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW through our Vision magazine.

Members, volunteers and employees do great work going above and beyond to support people experiencing hardship in local communities.

Vision also allows us to provide updates on operations and key campaigns.

We want to hear your feedback on Vision – it's your chance to shape what stories are featured and how regularly the magazine is produced.



Complete the short survey by scanning the QR code or visiting www.vinnies.org.au/vision.

You can also submit your story ideas and feedback at nsw.media@vinnies.org.au.

See past editions of Vision and our other publications at www.vinnies.org.au. You can also stay up to date on stories across the Society by following us on social media:

Facebook: Vinnies NSW | vinniesshopsnsw

LinkedIn: St Vincent de Paul Society NSW

Instagram: vinniesnsw | vinniesshopsnsw

TikTok: vinniesnsw

Vinnies Youth ignite their faith

Vinnies Youth members converged on Broken Bay in September to connect, deepen their faith and learn how to make an impact as part of the Ignite Catholic Youth Conference.

Held annually for more than two decades, the Ignite Conference brings together young people living their Catholic faith and a passion for sharing it with the world.

The Society was fortunate to present volunteering opportunities to attendees, highlighting how young people can put their faith into action by supporting those in need, making a positive impact, and living out the core values of charity, compassion, and justice.

Throughout the day, our Vinnies Youth engaged with many passionate young Catholics, sharing stories about the transformative power of service and how they can get involved in initiatives that help alleviate poverty, offer companionship, and support local communities. The message was clear: faith is not just something to be celebrated; it is something to be lived every day through concrete acts of love and service.

A big thanks also to the Ignite team, who generously donated excess food to our Vinnies Van services!

Vinnies Youth membership has grown over the last year to 900 young people engaged across the state. The Society was born out of the enthusiasm and boundless energy of youth – we are delighted to see that same spirit living on today.



Busking for Vinnies

Schools across Sydney continued a long-standing tradition of bringing music to the streets of Parramatta.

'Busking for Vinnies' has been a long-standing community outreach event, supported by Parramatta Council, held by the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW annually in Parramatta since the 1990s to raise awareness of the Society's services in the region.

"It's a great way for Vinnies to engage with the local community and showcase the services that are available for people to access in the area, including our van services and support centres," said Ashvini Ambihaipahar, Vinnies Metropolitan Regional Director.

We were delighted to have Our Lady of Mercy College (Parramatta), Parramatta Marist High School (Westmead), Mt St Benedict College (Pennant Hills), St Edmund's College (Wahroonga) and St John Paul II Catholic College (Schofields) take part in a series of lunchtime performances.

METROPOLITAN



37,000 people assisted in the last financial year

More than **2,300 members** across the region giving 26,000 hours of support

36% of people seeking support for the first time

44% of people experiencing housing stress

Anti-poverty week highlights the impact of members

We highlighted the impact our members have been able to make in the face of the cost of living crisis during Anti-Poverty Week.

With one in eight people currently living below the poverty line in Australia, including one in six children, our members have responded to a growing number of people across the state.

Mary Ryan, Eastlakes Regional President, spoke with the Newcastle Herald about the circumstances faced by people seeking assistance.

“Every week we see new people coming to us.”

"There are people living in tents tucked away where no one can see them, some in their cars, some are couch surfing with people who are prepared to give them some space for a while."

Food vouchers, clothing and household items and transport expenses have been among the most common forms of assistance provided by members in the Maitland/Newcastle Central Council.



ABC Radio visits Pete's Place

ABC Coffs Coast visited Pete's Place during Homelessness Week to get an up-close insight into the incredible work performed by our team every day.

"When it first started in 2018, we were seeing probably 10 people a day... now we're seeing between 70 and 120 every single day," said Gai Newman, Pete's Place Team Leader.

“The support that we can offer is really basic essential services. What we all need – food, laundry, showers, human connection – we're a place that people can call in... feel very safe... tell us about the important events in their lives.”

Pete's Place in Coffs Harbour is one of three drop-in centres run by the Society across the North Coast, along with Mary's Place in Ballina and Fred's Place in Tweed Heads.

Figures from the latest NSW Statewide Street Count emphasise the importance of these services with the Local Government Areas where each of these services are located all experiencing an increased number of rough sleepers over the last year.

Fortunately, our teams have responded by providing more than 121,000 on-site and takeaway meals at all three sites to people in need over the last year.

"It's such a diversity of people that come to Pete's Place and it's such a real sense of community," said Gai.

This year's Homelessness Week theme – 'Homelessness Action Now' – sought to raise awareness of the impact of homelessness and the solutions needed to address the issue at a national, state and local level.

NORTH EAST



30,000 people assisted in the last financial year

More than **750 members** across the region giving 15,000 hours of support

29% of people seeking support for the first time

50% of people experiencing housing stress

In loving memory of Don Hewitt

The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW is deeply saddened by the passing of Donald Hewitt OAM. Don passed on Tuesday 24 September, surrounded by his family, aged 85.

Don gave more than 58 years of his life in service to the St Vincent de Paul Society, where he played a pivotal role in establishing Freeman House in Armidale.

As incoming regional president in 1979, Don purchased the Crescent Guest House in Armidale to allow the Society to support people struggling with addiction. The service continued to be developed over many decades through funds provided by the Society and state and federal governments, and today stands as the largest residential rehabilitation service in Northern NSW

Don served in a number of positions across the Armidale Central Council, including as a founding member of St Augustine's Conference, and was honoured as a Life Member of the Society in 2015, along with being awarded an Order of Australia Medal during Australia Day honours in 2021.

Significantly, he received a Papal Honour – the Cross Pro Ecclesia Et Pontifice ('for the Church and the Pope') in recognition of his years of service in 2021.



The citation for the award stated: "Don has always acted out of faith to bring hope through serving in a sensitive manner those in need."

Don will be greatly missed by everyone across the Society, where he leaves a profound legacy of putting his faith into action. The Society extends its prayers to Don's wife Barbara and their six children and six grandchildren.

St Mary's Homework Club

Dedicated members of St Mary's Youth Conference in Armidale are making a remarkable difference in the lives of disadvantaged and culturally diverse children through their weekly Homework Club.

This initiative, supported by a generous philanthropic gift received at the beginning of the year, has created a nurturing environment that strives to transform lives by harnessing the power of connection.

At the heart of the Homework Club is the safety and belonging that youth members foster as tutors for the students.

By partnering students with the same tutor each week, the program nurtures these connections, recognising each child's individuality.

The positive impact of Homework Club has resonated deeply with families. One parent enthusiastically asked, "How can I help get the word out, so as many people

as possible can attend?" A student captured the spirit of the program simply, stating, "It's my favourite afternoon of the week."

As the program continues, the hope is to inspire even more families to join this supportive and transformative initiative.

NORTH WEST



10,500 people assisted in the last financial year

More than **400 members** across the region giving 4,300 hours of support

32% of people seeking support for the first time

41% of people experiencing housing stress

Significant milestone for Wollongong Conference

Members of the St Francis Xavier's Conference in Wollongong recently celebrated a historical milestone, with 100 years of continuous service in the community.

A commemorative mass was held at St Francis Xavier Cathedral, Wollongong to mark the occasion. The Centenary coincided with the annual Festival Mass for 2024, recognising the ongoing and far-reaching work of the Society across the Wollongong Diocese. Mass was celebrated by Bishop Brian Mascord and the congregation enjoyed listening to the magnificent Tongan choir.

In 1913, the first Conferences in the Wollongong region were established at Bulli, Corrimal, Jamberoo and Kiama but they all lapsed until August 1924 when the Conference of St Francis Xavier was founded.

Through the early 1930's, additional conferences were formed and in July 1935, the Wollongong Central Council, covering all conferences in the Diocese, was established.

Since then, the Wollongong Central Council has established more than 30 Conferences present in communities across the Illawarra, Shoalhaven, Southern Highlands, Campbelltown and Camden regions.

Together these Conferences assisted more than 12,000 people with over \$1.5m in support in the past financial year. In Wollongong's St Francis Xavier Conference alone, they have 11 members working in the local community who provided support to over 300 people. This assistance includes help with food, bills, clothing and household items, accommodation, transport.

A recent joint report with The McKell Institute found that the emergency relief program administered by Vinnies members, such as those in Wollongong's St Francis Xavier Conference, provides crucial assistance during crises, is effective in preventing specific crises, including eviction and severe hunger, and significantly enhances the well-being of clients.

Larry Jennett, President of the Wollongong Conference, got involved with Vinnies over 25 years ago. "It is satisfying to be able to provide help to people when they need it most. I had a phone call from a lady recently who had escaped domestic violence. We got her accommodation, we bought her a washing machine, got her some clothes. She was so happy."



The Conference is extremely thankful for the generosity of the local community to ensure the work of the Conference can continue. This includes ongoing support from local major sponsors; a bequest set up to fund Education and Rental Stress within the community; as well as generous parishioners who regularly donate at the Annual Winter and Christmas Appeals.

Another member of the St Francis Xavier's Conference is Elisabeth Objartel, she has been volunteering her time for an incredible 30 years. "I was called to do more in the community, donating wasn't enough for me anymore. I was working full time, but I would rearrange my day so that I could visit people in need. I immediately felt very welcome and part of the community when I got involved with Vinnies."

We thank all members past and present who have contributed to the work of the St Francis Xavier Conference over the last 100 years.

SOUTH



18,000 people assisted in the last financial year

More than **700 members** across the region giving 13,000 hours of support

33% of people seeking support for the first time

37% of people experiencing housing stress



Mini Vinnies Peak Hill: an example to follow

St Joseph's Parish School in Peak Hill may be one of the smallest schools in the Wilcannia Forbes Central Council, but it makes a big impact through an extremely active Mini Vinnies group.

As part of the 190 school Conferences across NSW, a dynamic group of 15 students participate in the Mini Vinnies program – an impressive feat for a school with only 32 students!

Mini Vinnies is a program that encourages students to learn about social disparities through advocacy within their local communities as part of their service-learning experience. Through a series of specifically designed resources, primary school students from grade 3 to 6 develop a sense of compassion and leadership skills. The program empowers students to put their values into action, learn about social justice and engage with the St Vincent de Paul Society.

St Joseph's Mini Vinnies group was established in 2013 and by the following year, it had elected a President and Committee and commissioned seven members. In 2015, they had the initiative of learning more about the Society and its founder, Frédéric Ozanam. Then, the group joined the Wrap With Love project, collaborating by knitting and collecting squares to make blankets for those in need. Additionally, they collected used postage stamps to raise funds for disadvantaged communities overseas.

On one occasion, parish priest, Father Manoj, informed the school community about Veronica, an Indian dentistry student who needed financial help to continue studying. The Mini Vinnies group decided to organise two activities: Toastie Tuesdays and a Mad Hatter's Tea Party fundraiser. They prepared toasted sandwiches and

wore crazy hats while selling treats from the canteen, respectively. They also offered pancakes and Easter eggs to raise money to donate to the Lismore Diocese Flood Appeal and Project Compassion.

Over the years, St Joseph's has organised several fundraising activities in which the entire school community actively participates. The Mini Vinnies group visit Peak Hill pre-schoolers regularly for buddy reading and play time, and also participate in activities such as dress up days, Money Trails and Milo Mondays. As part of their early 2024 calendar, the group had a moving commissioning Ceremony for their members and celebrated Easter by organising a fundraising event. Then, combining the Olympics and the Vinnies Winter Appeal, students celebrated with a Green and Gold Day.

Despite the challenges this year has brought with the closure of the Vinnies Shop in Peak Hill and people in need locally now being assisted by the Parkes Conference, the St Joseph's Mini Vinnies and their teachers continue enthusiastically representing the Society.

WEST



4,500 people assisted in the last financial year

More than **100 members** across the region giving 2,300 hours of support

27% of people seeking support for the first time

35% of people experiencing housing stress



A hopeful housing outcome

You may remember the story of Luke and his elderly father, Colin, who we featured as part of our Vinnies Winter Appeal.

We're delighted to share some great news about how they have been doing since being supported by Vinnies! Luke and his dad were experiencing homelessness for two years when his previous tenancy ended, resulting in a draining cycle of rental rejections.

Carrying more than anyone should have to bear without the stability of a home, Luke took on the responsibility of caring for his father while also holding down a full-time job.

"I've got to do just about 95% of all the basic things that someone would need to do or get done with [my father] being on disability," said Luke.

"It's a matter of I've got to do it or nothing's going to happen."

Thankfully, the support of Vinnies members intervened in Luke's time of need.

Vinnies paid for Luke to stay at a motel and helped admit Colin to hospital for treatment while advocating for the father and son to gain secure housing

Luke and Colin now have a two-bedroom unit to call their own, complete with case management to address their needs. It also means that Luke will be reunited with his beloved dog, who he was forced to surrender while homeless.

Stories like this demonstrate the impact Vinnies can make every day through our members.

Gaining a community of support

Tania has faced more challenges in a few years than most people face in a lifetime.

Relationship breakdowns. Mental health diagnoses. Poverty.

Through the toughest of days, she has persevered because of a constant source of hope.

"I just look at my kids and that's why I keep going."

Raising a teenage son and younger twin daughters on her own, the continued cost-of-living crisis has had devastating and unrelenting impacts for families like Tania's, who try to stretch their finances further as costs keep going up.

"At the end of a fortnight, I have \$53 and I don't get paid until Friday."

"I'll work out how much money I've got per day for the fortnight... I can't just go to the shops and go, 'we'll get this, this and this without knowing a budget.

"I have to pay for medication, it's \$20, but that's \$20 in fuel or something else.

"It means that we have to stay home and have two-minute noodles for the next couple of days – it is what it is, [my daughters] need those antibiotics.

"If I have to go without, I will go without."

Thankfully, Vinnies has been able to ease the load for Tania with support for her family.



First coming into contact with the St Vincent de Paul Society when she received a notice to vacate her rental property, Vinnies members were able to provide immediate support with food and clothing.

Gaining further assistance with referral services, including essential prescriptions for her twin daughters who live with chronic asthma, the ongoing support culminated in a transformative moment where she was offered a place through community housing that she now calls her forever home.

“I surprised my kids on the Friday when I picked them up, we started moving in that night, and then had our first night on the Saturday.”

“It’s home – safety, stability.”

Tania regards the support she has received from Vinnies as a community, “it’s not just one person that deals with you, it’s everyone coming in to help.”

“Vinnies go above and beyond; they’ve gotten to know me and I’m so grateful.”

This community is far-reaching with St Vincent de Paul Society NSW members supporting close to 100,000 people over the past year.

This alarming figure – rising by 14% from the previous 12 months – has placed significant strain on the most basic of needs with four in five people requesting food assistance and close to half citing housing stress.

People in Tania’s circumstances – sole parents with

dependents – made up close to a third of the people seeking assistance.

The rising cost-of-living remains an ever-present issue for Tania, as she works to manage competing expenses that result in having to weigh up choices that no one should have to make.

These choices are heartbreaking and reflect the demand for support at all times of year, but especially at Christmas.

Between November and January, 40% of all the people supported by St Vincent de Paul Society members in the last financial year requested some form of assistance.

With the support of Vinnies in place, Tania is looking towards the Christmas season with renewed hope.

“It’s not just a one-day event, it’s the lead up to it – I love the anticipation – I know what they’re getting, but I’m so excited to see them get it!

“Watching their faces light up while we’re making Christmas breakfast, whether it’s pancakes or bacon and eggs, and then getting to go and open up presents... they’re so excited and watching them playing with them.

“My present is seeing my kids happy and seeing their faces light up.”

You can make a difference to people in your community by making a donation to the Vinnies Christmas Appeal at www.vinnies.org.au or calling 13 18 12.

Saying “Thank You” to our donors

As part of the annual Vinnies Thank You Event, we showed our gratitude and appreciation to our generous donors.

Close to \$32 million in funds were raised over the past financial year, helping the Society to get important work done. To show our deep thanks and heartfelt appreciation, the Society invited supporters to a Thank You event at the Rydges Sydney Central to hear about the impact of their support.

Around 60 supporters, including Corporate Partners, Major Donors, Forever Friends, event sponsors and regular givers, attended where our leaders had the opportunity to meet, thank and let our benefactors know some of the ways they have supported those in need. Thanks to their belief in doing good and generosity, Vinnies has been able to respond to the growing demand for support.

In the last financial year, our compassionate benefactors contributed to the 9% growth in our appeals and regular giving income, along with supporting programs and events such as Vinnies Forever Friends Group and the Hotels Have Hearts gala dinner.

Richard Stewart (Chair of the Board) and Yolanda Saiz (Chief Executive Officer) thanked the donors, acknowledging the importance of their contributions, and shared testimonies on how the Society has been able to continue to serve the community through the funds raised.



Team Vinnies is Off and Running

Meet some of the amazing people who have recently raised much-needed funds by lacing up their running shoes for Team Vinnies.

Thank you to the Houston Group, a Surry Hills based strategic brand & design agency who represented Team Vinnies at the 2024 Real Insurance Sydney Harbour 5 & 10k Run in July. The run, a one lap loop around the Sydney Harbour foreshore proved challenging, but the sports-loving bunch ‘smashed’ the 10k run.

In August, Rosie Drum gathered in Sydney’s CBD to take part in the world’s largest fun run, the City2Surf. Running 14 kms from the city to Bondi Beach, Rosie took her City2Surf preparation seriously with regular training sessions which ultimately paid off. “I really enjoyed it! It was gruelling but a whole lot of fun.” Rosie surpassed her fundraising goals leaving her feeling “pretty chuffed.”

Like Rosie, Shemariah Gibbs-Williams also took part in the City2Surf for a reason close to her heart, having worked with Vinnies and “seen firsthand the tremendous care and hard work that goes into assisting those in need.” Originally from the UK, this was Shem’s first-time taking part in the iconic Sydney marathon and it didn’t disappoint. With a game plan to “half-run and half-walk” the route, soon she was in the zone and crossed the finish line having run the whole way.

If you like exercise, regardless of your fitness level why not consider signing up for Team Vinnies and raise money for people doing it tough?

To find out more information about Team Vinnies visit: fundraise.vinniesnsw.org.au or email: events@vinnies.org.au.

Corporates bring Christmas cheer

Our Corporate Partners marked the season of giving with generous contributions to support the work of our members, volunteers and employees. We are so grateful for the investment our partners make each year and sharing in our vision of a more just and compassionate society for all.



WORKPLACE GIVING

Be part of good

IGA

IGA's commitment to supporting households facing hardship began in 2012 and they have partnered once again on a national Christmas Appeal. Customers who purchased a \$2 Christmas Bauble in November and December, along with specially marked Community Chest products in December, from participating IGA supermarkets, have allowed the Society to bring joy to families during the festive season.

Amazon

Our friends at Amazon will ensure kids have the best chance to succeed in the classroom with 1,000 back-to-school packs to be distributed around the country in the new year. These packs will lighten the load for families feeling the cost of living pinch with stationery, lunchboxes and more provided. Amazon additionally remains ready to help the Society respond with Disaster Relief Hubs across the country stocked with critical relief items that can be distributed at short notice in the event of a natural disaster.

Gravox

We've partnered with Kraft Heinz for a second year on a national fundraiser that will see 20 cents from targeted Gravox products go towards the Society. Specially marked Gravox Traditional and Gravox Roast canisters will be available for sale in the lead up to Christmas, while Kraft has also donated a range of products to be distributed to households in need.

Helia

From 2011 to now, Helia – formerly known as Genworth – have been valued supporters of our services, including our network of Vinnies Vans and Our Lady of the Way domestic and family violence refuge. Helia's support has resulted in over \$1.2 million in funds, allowing the Society to change countless lives for the better each year.

Workplace Giving

We have recently revamped our Workplace Giving program, allowing employees to donate a small portion directly from their pre-tax salary each pay period to make a significant difference to people in need.

One of the greatest strengths of Workplace Giving is its simplicity and consistency. Small donations, combined with others, become a powerful force for good.

- One person pledging \$5 helps provide a meal for someone facing hardship.
- A group of 5 people pledging \$5 a week for a month helps cover a family's utility bills.
- A workplace of 50 people pledging \$5 a week all year helps cover operational costs for a crisis accommodation room.

By encouraging Workplace Giving, businesses can align their organisation with a meaningful cause and show commitment to making a lasting impact in the community.



Promoting recovery and reducing harm through NSW Drug Summit

The first Drug Summit held in NSW in 25 years brought together a range of perspectives, including that of the St Vincent de Paul Society, to work towards addressing how the state responds to drug use.

The NSW Government delivered on its 2023 election pledge to hold a drug summit with Sydney hosting a two-day forum in December preceded by regional events in Griffith and Lismore during November.

Funding was also provided to a range of organisations to launch and expand alcohol and other drugs services; the Society was one of the recipients to establish a regional AOD hub in Armidale.

In the lead up to the Drug Summit, ABC 7.30 was granted access to Freeman House, a residential rehabilitation and detoxification service in Armidale, to highlight the need for services and to hear first-hand from people accessing support.

ABC 7.30 spoke with Sharmain, one of the people supported through Freeman House, who shared her experience of accessing support and motivation to be reunited with her young son.

“I know this now because the rehab has made it clear that I do need to do this for me. If I have my son back, my independence, I will look back on these days and it was all worth it.”

People undergoing treatment at Freeman House stay for between three and 12 months with day and outreach programs also running to support people at various phases in their recovery journey.

Participants starting out undertake group sessions and individual counselling. As they progress over

time, greater emphasis is placed on engaging with the community with training provided for job qualifications and help to access housing.

A new addition to the service has been peer support workers – people with first-hand experience of addiction who can draw on their lived experience to help others navigating similar journeys.

The demand to access support from Freeman House is high with 180 people on a growing waitlist. Compounding matters is a lack of funding which means beds in the residential rehabilitation unit remain empty despite the need.

“I try and remind people that everybody on our wait list is someone's daughter, someone's son, someone's mother, someone's father, there's someone there that cares about that person and wants that person to get better,” Jessica Toole, Health Services Regional Manager, told ABC 7.30.

The Society operates a range of services addressing alcohol and other drugs. The Continuing Coordinated Care Program (CCCP) is delivered across the state, offering outreach support to people wanting to address their substance usage.

The Society's latest Social Justice Statement on alcohol and other drugs calls for increased funding for treatment and post-treatment services, investment in harm reduction initiatives, and a new holistic NSW Drug and Alcohol Strategy.



See the full ABC 7.30 story by scanning the QR code.



Rebuilding lives: the impact of Fred's Place

Dwayne's new beginning proves that compassion and care are paramount to rebuilding lives.

Tweed Heads has experienced a substantial increase in people experiencing homelessness and looking for help through services such as Fred's Place. The Vinnies-run hub aims to assist those in need, providing a safe, welcoming environment where people can access critical support, whether it's a shower, clean clothes, a meal, or simply a conversation with someone who cares. It also offers comprehensive services like drug and alcohol support, assistance with external services, and even help with transport. Here, people can begin to rebuild their lives with the guidance and care of staff and volunteers who genuinely care about them.

For people like Dwayne, Vinnies has been a safe place during his most difficult moments. His story of resilience began unexpectedly at Fred's Place. Six years ago, he found himself at a crossroads after the breakdown of a long-term relationship. Experiencing homelessness, he was struggling to survive day by day. That's when he discovered Fred's Place and the services and tailored support needed to rebuild his life.

"I moved up from Sydney and I was having a really rough time," Dwayne recalls.

"It's a good place to come and they treat people how you expect to be treated," Dwayne says, reflecting on his experiences. "They helped me when I was on the streets, with showering, washing and food."

At Fred's Place, Vinnies staff not only provided Dwayne with support for his immediate needs but helped him with housing processes. "I've had a place for the last four years now," he shares with a sense of pride, "it put down roots and foundation."

Finding Hope and Home

At the Nagle Centre, Tony reflects on his challenging journey to find a place to call home.

Tony's troubles began at a caravan park where he faced eviction. Leaving on his own terms, he went to various transitional properties, unable to find the stability he was requiring at the time. He finally moved to the Nagle Centre in Albury where he found in Vinnies the support he had been looking for.

His home is part of the Social and Affordable Housing Fund (SAHF), a program providing over 500 homes in 12 locations operated by the Society across the state. Whilst providing access to homes to people who need them most, residents like Tony receive tailored help for their individual needs, allowing them to achieve their goals. Vinnies has changed Tony's life as he now has a safe and stable place to live.

"I'm happier than I would have been otherwise," he says.

One of the more meaningful aspects of his life at the Nagle Centre is the support he receives from the community. On Tuesday nights, residents receive meals that students from local schools prepare as part of an initiative to help those in need, "everybody comes in and gets a meal. It's great!," Tony says, appreciating the effort behind the service.

Looking back, Tony feels immense gratitude for Vinnies. "It means everything to me," he says. We have given him not just a place to live, but a home. A place that provides stability amidst the uncertainty of life. Through Vinnies, Tony has regained a sense of purpose, independence, and most importantly, hope.



Social Justice Statements outline our view for a more just and compassionate NSW

Imagine an Australia where people have affordable and healthy housing that feels like home. Where everyone can live safely within their own homes and be treated with respect in their relationships. Or where everyone can access the daily essentials they need - like nutritious food and affordable energy.

These are just some of the aspirations that the Society NSW's new Social Justice Statements set out. The Statements, approved by State Council, outline the Society's social policy positions. They were developed by the Policy and Advocacy Team in collaboration with the NSW Social Justice Committee following consultation with staff, services and the sector.

A First Nations Social Justice Statement is currently under consultation and development.

So how can you help to promote our recommendations to create a more just and compassionate society?

We encourage all members, volunteers and staff to read and promote these Statements. In particular, you can help by advocating for the recommendations set out in the Statements with your local MP or local council member and discuss the key issue/s that your region, suburb or community faces.

Find our NSW Social Justice Statements at www.vinnies.org.au/nsw/advocacy/social-justice-statements. National Council's statements are also available at: www.vinnies.org.au/advocacy.

Contact social.justice@vinnies.org.au for more information.

Together the Social Justice Statements set out the Society NSW's recommendations in eight priority areas:

Alcohol & Other Drugs

'Meeting people where they are at, without judgement, welcoming them in all their diversity, and ensuring they have access to support that reduces harm, gives people a far better chance of recovery and having good health and wellbeing.'

Temporary Visas

'All people who call Australia home, whether that be from birth or in more recent years, should be treated with dignity, afforded the same human rights, and granted access to help when needed.'

Cost of Living

'Poverty negatively impacts people's social and emotional well-being and physical and mental health.'

Homelessness

'On any given night across NSW around 35,000 people are experiencing homelessness.'

Renting

'More people are renting and are renting for longer than ever before.'

Social Housing

'Social housing comprises around 4.5% of NSW residential dwellings, below the OECD average of 7%.'

Climate Justice

'People experiencing poverty or disadvantage have access to fewer resources to cope, adapt and recover from climate disasters.'

Domestic & Family Violence

'Everyone should be able to live safely within their own homes and be treated with respect in their relationships.'

Rosalie Rendu Forum discusses rental reform

Renting has traditionally been seen as a step on the path towards the Australian Dream of home ownership.

Today, that aspiration is increasingly becoming out of reach as people rent in greater numbers and for longer periods of time.

With over 30% of people nationwide now renting, a growing awareness of the need for renting to be a viable long-term option has prompted calls for reforms, particularly on the issue of no-grounds evictions.

The NSW Government pledged to reform rental laws as part of its 2023 state election pitch and introduced legislation in October 2024 to end no-grounds evictions and other measures in order to provide people with greater housing security.

Each Anti-Poverty Week, the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW holds the Rosalie Rendu Forum, a discussion bringing together a panel of distinguished women, named in recognition of Sister Rosalie Rendu's contribution to the Society, to offer insights into pressing social justice issues.

The 2024 Rosalie Rendu Forum put the focus on rental reform by posing the question, "is ending no grounds evictions the end of the story?"

We were delighted to have Trina Jones (NSW Rental Commissioner), Dr Jemima Mowbray (Tenants' Union of NSW), Dr Penelope Bowyer-Pont (Macquarie University) and Anna Scott (Vinnies Services) join us for an online discussion moderated by Solange Frost (Vinnies South Regional Director).

Issues raised during the evening included the experiences of people supported by the Society in navigating the rental market, the impact of the government's proposed reforms, examples of rent regulation from around the world, the need to improve the quality of rental housing and giving renters the confidence to exercise their rights.

The evening concluded with each of the panelists offering hopes for the future:

"I personally would like to see a cap on rents that is controlled between tenancies, not resetting at the beginning of each new tenancy." – Dr Penelope Bowyer-Pont



"[We'd] like to see further protections from discrimination in the rental assessment process... by the nature of [people] experiencing homelessness or accessing our support or using a rental bond loan, people feel and experience discrimination in accessing rental properties." – Anna Scott

"The next big tranche of reforms is around privacy and transparency. We're going to standardise application forms to eliminate as much as possible discrimination in the rental application process and ensure that we can protect renters' data and reduce risk of identity theft, fraud and use of that data that could put them at risk." – Trina Jones

"I love that renters are standing up and the community is standing up with us to say, 'actually, let's see change here. Let's make every home a decent home to live in, let's make every home affordable, let's make sure everyone has a home.'" – Dr Jemima Mowbray

St Vincent de Paul Society NSW thanks Ms Jones, Dr Mowbray, Dr Bowyer-Pont, Ms Scott, Ms Frost and Leonie Duck, who delivered a reflection on the legacy of Sister Rosalie Rendu, for their involvement in an enlightening Rosalie Rendu Forum.



Scan the QR code to view the 2024 Rosalie Rendu Forum.

New Return and Earn sites a fundraising success for schools, clubs and charities

Vinnies Return and Earn depots have proven to be a valuable resource across NSW, allowing residents in metro and regional areas to utilise the container deposit scheme.

One of the key features driving the success of the depots is a convenient drive-through service that can easily handle large volumes of recyclable items.

Our sorting machines have the capability to process up to 100 containers per minute without separating plastics from glass, making the bulk processing facilities a favourite for local businesses, sporting teams and schools who use the depots for charitable fundraising purposes.

In Maitland, the facility in Rutherford was quickly adopted as a tool for community fundraising after it opened in 2024. Local groups, such as the Maitland Sunrise Rotary Club, took advantage of the opportunity to raise funds through container recycling. Members visited the Return and Earn depot every week with bags of containers collected from the Bowling Club and Golf Club each Friday. The Rotary Club's can and bottle recycling program raised over \$10,000 in just one year, with proceeds supporting environmental and community projects.

The Griffith community have also welcomed their new Return and Earn depot, which opened in 2024. Binya Public School's Parents and Citizens (P&C) group are collecting up to 3,000 containers weekly for regular drop offs. Young students pitch in to the effort by packing containers into bags, which are then transported to the Griffith depot. The funds raised contribute directly to enhancing educational resources, staffing, and essential learning materials.

In Tweed Heads, the P&C at Bogangar Public School has harnessed the power of the Return and Earn scheme to raise money for school projects. With support from parents, community members, and local businesses, the school has secured over \$4,500 in the past two years, funding new playgrounds and shade sails.

The depot in Dubbo has also been a focal point for community-driven recycling efforts. The team behind the charity Help A Mate collected containers from across the city, with proceeds supporting local causes



like Tradies In Sight which promotes mental health awareness among men.

As part of the Vinnies Return and Earn container deposit scheme, customers can choose to donate their 10c container refund to St Vincent de Paul Society NSW. Hotel maintenance staff at Accor's Mercure Penrith are taking advantage of this charitable option by collecting containers from guests and sending them to the local Penrith Return and Earn depot. The refund proceeds are split, with half benefiting St Vincent de Paul Society NSW and the other half supporting local community events and sponsorships.

Vinnies Return and Earn depots across NSW recently marked a significant milestone, processing a staggering half a billion containers over the six years since the scheme was introduced. This achievement highlights the program's success, not only in promoting recycling but also in supporting local communities through the 10-cent container refund initiative.



Massive Vinnies donation box pops up in Sydney CBD for latest retail campaign

On a spring morning in Sydney's CBD, office workers making their daily commute to the city discovered that a massive Vinnies donation box had popped up on George Street.

Towering over passers-by at an impressive four metres tall, the giant box asked people to 'Bring Your Best' quality clothing and fashion accessories to donate during the retail campaign activation. A circular hole on each wall allowed those walking by to peek inside, watching as the donations slowly filled up the empty space.

Adorned with the new Vinnies retail branding, the box was designed to raise awareness of the positive impacts that come with donating to Vinnies. Messages on each side explained how each donation contributes to a greater impact through Vinnies' good works.

The clothing collection effort also extended into corporate offices within the CBD. Representatives from local businesses were invited to take one of 50 smaller donation boxes then encourage employees to bring in items from home to donate.

Vinnies enlisted the help of Australian reality TV stars Jules Robinson, Brittany Hockley and Lachlan McLean, plus ex-NRL footballer Josh Reynolds and a host of other micro influencers, to launch the campaign and spread the word about the tangible impact that donating clothes can have on people who are doing it tough.

By the end of the 72-hour activation period, over 360 kgs of clothing had been placed inside the big box for donation to Vinnies. These donations were transported to our distribution centre where they get sent out to our network of 220+ shops around NSW.

Vinnies shop in Fairy Meadow now reopen after major revamp

After water damage from a freak storm caused a three-month closure, the revamped Vinnies Fairy Meadow shop reopened in August. To celebrate, all customers who shopped at the store on opening day received free fairy floss and a complimentary goodie bag with their purchases.

Volunteers and staff at Fairy Meadow worked in neighbouring areas while the shop received a major renovation. They were excited to return to their location which features a new, fresh look.

"The team at Fairy Meadow are thrilled to be reopening the doors of our Fairy Meadow shop. It has a new modern feeling and a wide range of options for people looking to find some pre-loved treasures, while at the same time giving back to their local community." says Sarah Harris, Retail Area Manager.

More than just a place to shop for second-hand goods, this location is the first in NSW to host a donation chute, providing members of the local community with an easy way to drop off their pre-loved items.

As a beloved staple in the area, the Fairy Meadow shop has always been a go-to destination for locals. It has now welcomed a surge of new customers, drawn by its fresh look and the diverse, exciting stock on offer. The revamp has not only enhanced the shopping experience but also reinforced the shop's role as a vibrant hub for the community, catering to a wide range of tastes and needs.





Meet our 2024 NSW Volunteer of the Year nominee – the Chatswood ‘Counter Queen’

On Saturday afternoons, Sandra Byak’s friendly smile charms customers at Vinnies Chatswood as they tally up their purchases at the sales counter.

“She’s the ‘Counter Queen’,” says Manoj Kc, the Retail Cluster Manager who recently nominated Sandra for Senior Volunteer of the Year in the 2024 NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards. “She is always positive and always smiling and helpful and promoting [Vinnies]”.

Mr. Kc says he nominated Sandra, an 82-year-old Vinnies veteran, to recognise her dedication in over three decades of volunteering at the Chatswood shop. He explains that she never hesitates to come in when they need extra assistance, even when she’s not rostered on. “I had a couple of situations where I had to call her, even though she doesn’t work that day,” he says.

“She feels like ‘I need to help them’, that’s her attitude ... she’s an absolutely amazing lady.”

Despite having a full family life with four children and nine grandchildren, Sandra faithfully devotes her spare time to helping people in need. Her earlier years of volunteer work included assisting at her children’s school where she would run the tuck shop and lend a hand at school fetes. “I was born Catholic and I always

went to church. My Christian duty is to do something for someone else, and so I was always very involved at school,” she explains.

When her youngest son finished up his years as a student, she decided to turn to volunteering for Vinnies and with the local council. “Well I’ve got the energy and I’ve got the time and why not?” says Sandra.

“I do like being behind the counter [at Vinnies], you know, greeting people, and sort of helping ... they say I’m such a good salesperson!” she smiles.

Sandra’s dedication is also evident in her volunteer work through Willoughby City Council. Twice a month she provides linen service to assist people in continuing to live independently in their own homes. She also delivers Meals on Wheels twice per week, driving to at least five homes to bring senior residents a nutritious hot meal.

The NSW Volunteer of the Year Award ceremonies are hosted by The Centre for Volunteering and are held annually in 24 locations around the state. Sandra was previously nominated at the North Shore Award Ceremony in 2019 for her work with Meals on Wheels through Willoughby City Council, and in 2024 her nomination was for her 31 years of service to Vinnies.

Springwood members share a century of memories

Cliff Smith, Margaret Smith and Martin Clarke have seen plenty and given back even more as members of the St Vincent de Paul Society.

Belonging to Springwood's St Thomas Aquinas Conference, based in the Blue Mountains, the trio have contributed more than 140 years of service – an impressive feat for a Conference that first formed in 1938.

As the veteran of the group, Cliff's introduction to the Society came towards the end of the 1950s with a tap on the shoulder from a mate inviting him to come along to a meeting after work.

Cliff recalls members of the Windsor Conference pairing up under the cover of darkness in those days, "I was told to be careful of Alsations," offering support as far as Wiseman's Ferry, Riverstone and Richmond. The Scheyville Migrant camp also became a regular site for visitations as members helped migrants from Baltic states acclimatise to their new lives in Australia.

Cliff met Margaret through the local Catholic Youth Organisation and after marrying in 1967 transferred to the Richmond Conference before settling in Springwood at the turn of the 1980s.

Margaret's initial involvement with the Society was as a shop volunteer and eventually joined an evening Conference in the early 1990s. Martin's start came in 1980 responding to a parish survey, "I ticked the box for St Vincent de Paul and next Tuesday there are two men on my doorstep! I was invited to the following meeting and that was the way it went."

Holding a shared purpose in living the gospel values and following the Vincentian tradition, the trio have stepped

up in times of crisis including the bushfires that swept through the region in 2013.

Christmas has traditionally been a busy time for members in Springwood.

Local schools support the Conference to distribute hampers, while one of Margaret's fondest memories of the festive season came while working in the Vinnies Shop in the 1990s where she received a call from the Masonic Lodge with an offer of 500 dressed chickens.

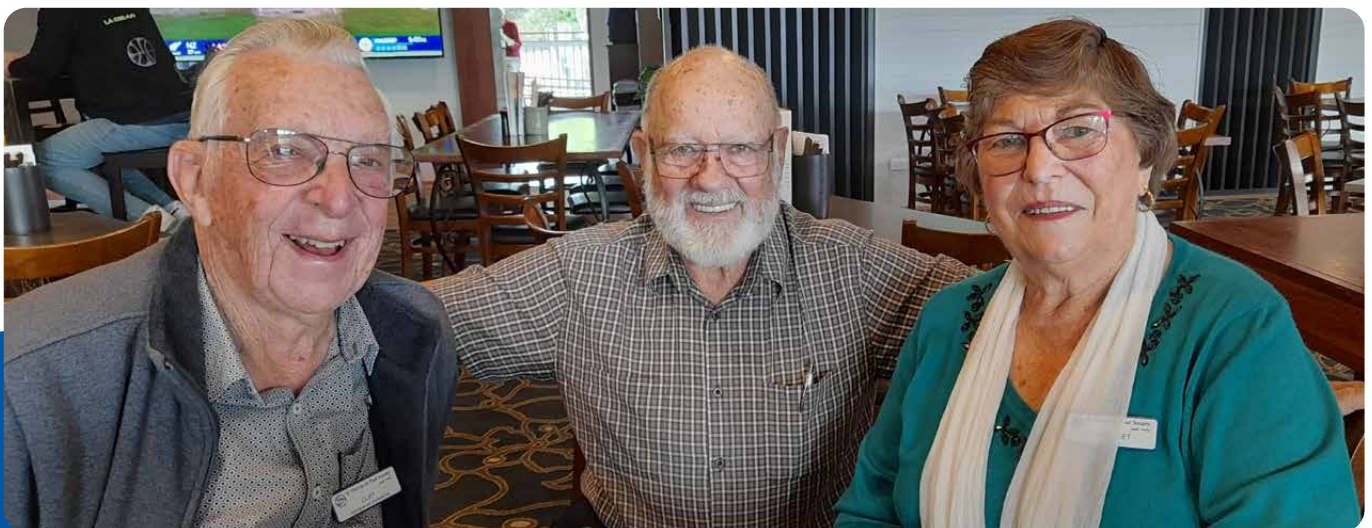
Hiring a refrigerated truck to make deliveries up and down the mountains, the relationship continued for many years including one year where tables were lined with fresh fruit and vegetables for people to come in and collect.

"The beauty of that was people took what they could use, nobody ever stacked their bags – it was the most beautiful day," says Margaret.

The faces of people seeking assistance may have changed over the years, but a common sense of fulfillment is shared by Cliff, Margaret and Martin at being able to make an enduring difference in people's lives.

"We might not see them in-person, but you see a notice in the paper or you hear from somebody about how well the kids are, whether somebody's graduated uni or mum's got a permanent job and it's lovely."

"I just think that St Vincent de Paul was the best thing that ever happened to the world! It reaches far and wide and the more you're involved with it, the more you realise how enormous it is," says Margaret.



NSW Vinnies Community Sleepout: an experience that changes lives

The NSW Vinnies Community Sleepout exceeded expectations in 2024 with \$193,000 raised in participating locations across the state.

The annual event took place on 30 August in Albury, Armidale, Greater Sydney, Tweed Heads and Wagga Wagga with 268 participants facing the cold of the night to gain an understanding of the harsh realities faced by people experiencing homelessness. Participants were offered little more than a piece of cardboard for shelter and a light supper on the night. In addition to sleeping out, participants learned more about the impacts of homelessness and how they can take action in their community.

The funds raised during the NSW Vinnies Community Sleepout will support different Vinnies services where people facing homelessness and hardship are assisted with food vouchers, rent, medical expenses and many other essentials. As nearly 1 in 208 people are experiencing homelessness in Australia, these funds will allow our members to respond to the growing demand for support.

“Events like the NSW Vinnies Community Sleepout draw attention to the widespread challenges faced by communities as well as the ability for people to make a



difference at a local level,” said Yolanda Saiz, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW CEO.

Thanks to the efforts of attendees, volunteers and donors, a total amount of \$193,359 was raised, exceeding expectations. These funds will make a difference, not only by bringing individuals together with a united cause that benefits the community, but also ensuring that the Society can continue to provide support to people facing hardship through tailored help to rebuild their lives.

Funds raised

Albury	\$25,869
Armidale	\$35,401
Fred’s Place (Tweed Heads)	\$34,678
Greater Sydney	\$81,392
Wagga Wagga	\$16,019
Fundraising goal	\$192,000
Total funds raised	\$193,359

New MAVS Hub to make maximum impact

There are so many ways that members and volunteers can make an impact as part of the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW.

Whether it’s distributing assistance to households facing hardship, volunteering at one of our Vinnies Shops or advocating to bring about systemic change with the social justice network, there’s a place for you – whatever your passion – at the Society.

To ensure that everyone can get the most out of their Society experience, and give back to the people we assist, we’ve given our Members and Volunteers (MAVS) Hub a refresh!

The new MAVS Hub acts as a one-stop shop, showcasing the diverse opportunities available to members and volunteers, including member assistance programs, social justice initiatives, spirituality resources, and fundraising tips for Conferences.

Find out how to recruit new members and volunteers to join your local Conference or service through our development guides and stay up to date with key events happening in your region.

Members and volunteers can also access safeguarding resources and compliance training as part of the MAVS Hub to ensure that the Society is adhering to NSW Child Safe Standards.

Take a look at the new MAVS Hub at: mavs.vinnies.org.au

A new sound for Mini Vinnies

The musical collaboration of the year has taken place with the Forbes Street Band teaming up with St Anthony of Padua Catholic College for a new Mini Vinnies anthem.

The Forbes Street Band, made up of people supported through music at the Ozanam Learning Centre, performed at the 2024 Vinnies CEO Sleepout and were recently featured on A Current Affair. Their latest release saw the group write and record an anthem for Mini Vinnies, a program instilling school-aged children with social justice values that will last a lifetime.

The former Mini Vinnies song originated in the UK and has been used for the past five years. The new version retains the core values of Mini Vinnies with a clear, crisp sound that is informed by the people Vinnies assists.

St Anthony of Padua Catholic College's Mini Vinnies group were selected to perform as part of the song, adding a positive, affirmative sheen to the background vocals on the chorus.

The new Mini Vinnies anthem was complemented by a music video, highlighting the impact of the Society's good works, that will be released in the new year.

**In the city, on the land
Reaching out a helping hand
Willing to take the lead
Aiding those in need
Sharing in the neighbourhood
Caring by doing good
Fighting all poverty
Mini Vinnies community**

There are currently 190 school Conferences, including Mini Vinnies programs, active in NSW schools. The Society is also engaged with close to 300 schools in support of our major appeals and other volunteering opportunities.



Schools celebrate culture through art

Our Schools & Youth Engagement Team joined together with the Society's First Nations Staff Network to introduce a NAIDOC poster competition.

The inaugural competition was launched ahead of NAIDOC Week to schools and Vinnies employees. Participants were encouraged to create an artistic poster to celebrate this year's theme, "Keep the Fire Burning! Blak, Loud & Proud".

We received a collection of creative entries that will be featured in upcoming publications and displayed at various Society locations throughout the state.

Winners received a Vinnies backpack filled with First Nations themed stationery and a certificate to commemorate their achievements.



Vocation to serve and love for travelling: In memoriam, Margaret Mary Finnegan

A love for exploring different cultures took Margaret to a once in a lifetime journey.

Margaret Mary Finnegan was born on January 12, 1932, in Eastwood, Sydney. She was a vibrant and independent woman with a strong spirit of adventure and service. Baptised at Ryde and raised in a family of four children, she grew up in Epping, Lewisham, and Dulwich Hill, where her father managed grocery shops. Margaret attended Lewisham Catholic School and spent holidays with her grandmother in Shellharbour.

In her early career, Margaret worked as a bookkeeper at GIO and motivated by her desire to travel, took on a second job as a waitress to save more money. At 24, she embarked on a solo overseas journey, an uncommon choice for women of her time. Margaret travelled to Canada, where she secured a job in Vancouver, paying wages to railway workers on the Pacific Great Eastern Railway. She embraced the Canadian lifestyle, experiencing snow for the first time, and made lifelong friendships.

Margaret's travels extended beyond Canada. She explored Mexico and had the opportunity to visit New Orleans where she enjoyed her favourite kind of music, jazz. She also travelled to Las Vegas, the Grand Canyon and Oklahoma. She spent Christmas in Toronto and then she moved there for some time to work for Mobil Oil. Once settled in, she lived with three roommates and her passion for tennis took her to join a group to play regularly. After four and a half years abroad, she returned to Australia in 1960 and resumed her life with her parents.

Her adventurous spirit continued with travels to Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Bali, Hong Kong, and throughout England and Ireland. Margaret's religious devotion deepened as she became actively involved in the Legion of Mary at St. Francis Xavier's Catholic Church, in Ashbury. She served in multiple roles, from being the secretary, reading at Mass, becoming a Eucharistic Minister to running the Piety Store, which lasted for 30 years. Her life was motivated in service to others, with a strong emphasis on evangelism and devotion to Mary and the Holy Spirit.

Later in life, Margaret moved to a townhouse in Ashfield and eventually to St Mary's Villa, a nursing home, after her sister's passing. Despite her age, she continued to travel, enjoy social outings, and stay connected to family and friends. Margaret passed peacefully on August 29, 2023, at Concord Hospital.

Her nieces remember her as a kind woman with a hearty laugh and a good sense of humour. As quoted by Margaret herself "life in the Legion of Mary was to promote the love of Mary and devotion to the Rosary, guided by the Holy Spirit," showing how deeply devoted to faith and service she lived.

Margaret regularly contributed to a number of charities, including the St Vincent de Paul Society. She was a very generous woman and decided to leave a bequest to support those in need. We thank her and extend our sympathy to her beloved ones for their loss.

To learn more about leaving a bequest to the Society, please contact our Gifts in Wills & Estates Team on **(02) 8622 0387** or **bequests@vinnies.org.au**.

How we care for the individual

The St Vincent de Paul Society aspires to be an inclusive place for all.

From the birth of the Society in Frederic Ozanam's Paris, the establishment of the first Conference in NSW by Charles O'Neill and the contemporary world we know today, our mission and vision to shape a more just and compassionate society has always been one embodied in inclusion.

The Rule calls for us as Vincentians to serve with hope and without judgement (1.2).

What is this act of inclusivity and why is it important to be lived out through our actions, and at the very heart and soul of what we do?

In following the example of Jesus' ministry through our Catholic Social Teachings, we must cherish the

human dignity of the individual person, reaching out and enabling human flourishing. We should strive to be there for anyone who calls out in need of assistance. They should feel that the Society is a safe environment for them to be who they are, without judgement, and know that we will be there for them.

The example set by Christ is one of serving through the intimacy of a meal to accompanying people in their journeys, and, in doing so, restoring them into society. His legacy was one of inclusion and compassionate care for all people. He brought in those that the world sought to reject to tell them one thing: they were loved.

In all of our works, we need to seek to act the same by providing space for people to know they are safe, cared for and recognised.

We are called to show unconditional love to all people.

The Society is uniquely placed to live out this calling. We have a presence throughout the state in communities through our Conferences, shops and services.

For those who may feel uncomfortable stepping foot into a church, the Society, through our places of work, can act as a place where the gospel message of love can be found.

The Society has more than 220 Vinnies Shops located throughout the state. For context, there are four Vinnies Shops for every one Harvey Norman in NSW. These shops play a vital role in raising funds to enable our good works, but also act as a symbolic representation of who we are and what we value.

These are places where people can reach out for assistance and be met with a hand-up that offers non-judgmental recognition and support.

The way we conduct our work has changed over time, yet the essence of why we do it remains eternal.

The Rule speaks of the need to renew and adapt to the changing conditions of the world (1.6). It cannot rest solely on people in need of assistance to reach out in a time of need. An onus also lays with us, as Vincentians, to signal to the vulnerable that they are welcome.

We can often view the figure of Christ exclusively in divine terms. In doing so, we overlook Christ's humanity and the vulnerability of Christ's actions, resulting in the ultimate sacrifice for love. Christ was both fully human and fully divine. The vulnerability Christ showed in becoming human is within all of us. That same vulnerability is capable of making judgements on others but enables us to love them in the same moments.

Acting without judgement is something that we all need to keep challenging ourselves to improve upon. Vincentian spirituality is a constant work in progress that should not be viewed as an achievement capable of being completed in full.

The work we perform each day is rooted in the example of Jesus. It is where we recognise the innate dignity of a person, so that they may flourish and know that they are loved.

THIS CHRISTMAS FAMILIES LIKE TANIA'S NEED YOUR URGENT HELP.



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to the Vinnies
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